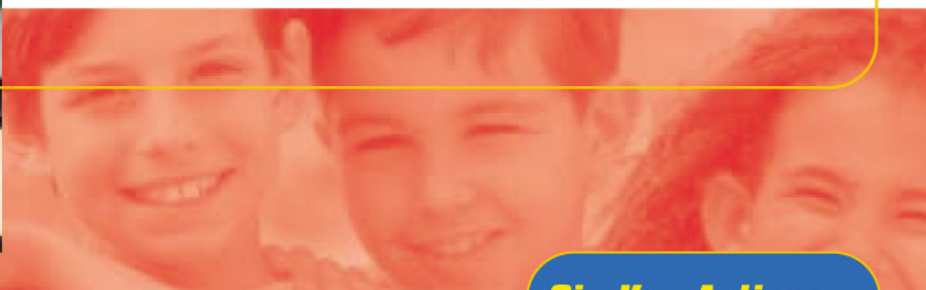


Talk with Your Fifth Grader About Underage Drinking



Reach Out Now

Your fifth grader is trying on new clothes, new friends, and new behaviors. Could alcohol be involved in those new behaviors? Nearly 10.5 million youth between 12–20 are underage drinkers; and the average age of first use keeps dropping. So, fifth grade is not too early to start talking with your child about underage drinking. Getting a dialogue going about underage drinking isn't easy, but this publication produced by Scholastic can help you and your fifth grader get started. You may be amazed by what you learn about your child and what your child can learn from you. The benefits of that dialogue can last a lifetime.

*Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*

You Can Make a Difference

Parents' disapproval of youthful alcohol use has been identified as the key reason children choose *not* to drink.¹ The goal of the *Talk with Your Fifth Grader About Underage Drinking* program is to prevent underage drinking.

Use the ideas and activities presented here as guidelines to adapt to your own style and your own words. Remember, no one knows your child as well as you do, and no one has more influence on your child's behavior.²

In Fifth Grade, Your Child Is at a Critical Age

Many parents feel that their 10- or 11-year-old child is too young to discuss underage drinking. While it is true that most fifth graders do not drink alcohol, some 10- and 11-year-olds have begun experimenting with alcohol use. In one study, one-third of fourth graders and more than half of sixth graders reported having been pressured by friends to drink alcohol.⁴

Now is the time to talk about underage drinking. After all, your child may already have access to alcohol and may have been faced with making decisions for which he or she is not yet prepared. Help provide the knowledge and understanding children need to recognize why they should not be drinking and help them build the practical skills to reject alcohol.

Six Key Actions

Here are six actions³ you can take to help your child make wise decisions about the use of alcohol:

- ▶ Establish and maintain good communication with your child.
- ▶ Get involved and stay involved in your child's life.
- ▶ Make clear rules and enforce them with consistency and appropriate consequences.
- ▶ Be a positive role model.
- ▶ Teach your child to choose friends wisely.
- ▶ Monitor your child's activities.



Using This Guide

This page contains facts for you and your child about underage drinking and tips for talking about alcohol. Use the powerful information in the facts below and in the suggested activities on pages 3 and 4 to talk with your child about this important topic.

Facing Facts

- The majority of children and youths are not current drinkers. In fact, 60% of youths aged 12–17 haven't ever had a drink.⁵
- Research shows that people who took their first drink before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependency than those who started after the age of 21.⁶
- In one survey of sixth graders, over half said it would be easy for someone their age to get alcohol at a party. And in a recent national survey, 72% of eighth graders said alcohol was “fairly easy” or “very easy” to get.⁷

Talk and Action Go Hand-in-Hand

As someone who cares for and about a child, you are in a position of tremendous influence. What you do and say every day can affect your child's attitude about underage drinking.



By providing a clear and consistent message that underage alcohol use is unacceptable and by keeping lines of communication open, it is more likely that your child will continue to look to you for advice on this and other serious issues in the future. Whether you drink alcohol or not, you can take steps to lessen the likelihood that your child will engage in underage drinking:

- Talk about family rules about the use of alcohol. This may include a discussion of alcohol used in religious observance.
- Make it clear that alcohol use before age 21 is unacceptable and against the law. Explain that alcohol has many negative effects on drinkers of different ages, but that its effects on the



developing brain and body of a person under age 21 are especially harmful.

- Follow the Federal recommendation that adults, if they drink, limit alcohol consumption to 1–2 drinks a day. Remember that drinking and driving don't mix, and that the same goes for alcohol and prescription medicine.
- Monitor alcohol kept in your home.
- Consider not serving alcohol to other adults at child-focused events, such as a graduation or birthday party.
- Think carefully about what to tell children when they ask whether you used alcohol as a teen. If you were an underage drinker, share some of the lessons you have learned from that experience. Be clear in explaining why underage drinking was not a good idea then and is not a good idea now.⁸

If you or a family member is in recovery, now is the time to talk with your child about the disease of alcoholism. You need to explain that your child may be more vulnerable to developing a drinking problem if he or she chooses to drink when older.

The *True/False Quiz* on page 3 is a tool to help you continue a discussion about your family's rules and consequences regarding underage drinking. When talking with your child, listen first, then ask questions. Remember to send a clear, consistent message about underage drinking. The earlier you begin sharing with your child, the more he or she will value communications with you as an important part of life. Remember: When you talk with your child about underage drinking, your child will listen.

Alcohol: A True/False Quiz

Directions

Read each statement aloud, then discuss the answers given below. Use this as an opportunity to explain your family's rules about underage drinking. Your child's teacher will use this quiz as part of a lesson about the effects of alcohol.

Alcohol slows down your body and mind.

True. Alcohol is a depressant; it leaves you unable to think, react, and make decisions as you normally would. If you drink enough to get alcohol poisoning, your brain slows down so much you can stop breathing and can die.⁹

Alcohol affects different people in different ways.

True. Alcohol's effects depend on a person's age, sex, and body weight, and on hereditary factors. The same person can be affected differently at different times of the day, depending on how much they've eaten, how tired they are, and many other factors. Because young people's bodies are smaller and still developing, alcohol has a greater impact on their physical and mental health than it does on an adult.¹⁰

You feel alcohol's effects right away.

True. Alcohol is absorbed very quickly (within 5–10 minutes). It passes from your stomach directly into your bloodstream and affects every organ, including your brain.

Beer and wine coolers are as harmful as other forms of alcohol.

True. There is about the same amount of alcohol in a 12-ounce can of beer as there is in a mixed drink that contains 1 ounce of hard liquor or in a 5-ounce glass of wine or in a wine cooler.¹¹

Sources for More Information

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):
www.samhsa.gov

SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI):
800-729-6686
www.health.org

Cool Spot: www.thecoolspot.gov

Healthfinder: www.healthfinder.org

Keeping Youth Drug-Free, available from NCADI

Some of the signs that a person has a problem with alcohol are:

- Getting drunk on a regular basis.
- Lying about how much alcohol he or she is using.
- Believing that alcohol is necessary to have fun.
- Forgetting what happened while drinking.¹²

True. You can and should help by encouraging the person to stop drinking and to seek professional help.





Taking Action

Role-Play Healthy Decisions

In this activity, you and your fifth grader will role-play ways of refusing alcohol. Finding creative ways to say “No” requires lots of practice.

Begin a discussion with your child about making healthy decisions by sharing some of the ways that you make decisions. These might include *getting the facts*, *considering options*, *telling others your decision*, and *accepting their response*. Ask how your child

makes up his or her mind about important issues. Then discuss ways of politely but firmly refusing when someone asks you to do something you have decided not to do. Practice these four techniques for saying “No.”

- **Repeat:** “No, I don’t want to.” “No thanks.” “No, I can’t.”
- **Justify:** “I can’t. I have to ____.” [Make an excuse.]
- **Substitute:** “No, let’s ____.” [Substitute another activity.]
- **Walk Away:** “No. I have to go.”

Create a Family Calendar

If you don’t already do so, start to keep track of family schedules on one calendar. Post the calendar on the refrigerator or other prominent spot and ask each family member to be in charge of updating his or her upcoming activities to keep them current. A calendar can help you monitor your child’s activities and stay involved. Make a point of discussing with your child the details of his or her schedule—the where, when, what, and who with—for every activity. It is much easier to establish rules and routines when your child is in fifth grade than it is when that child is 16 or 17, in high school and able to drive.

Volunteer in Your Community

Encourage your children to look beyond themselves and become a part of their larger community. One important way to do this is through volunteer activities. Research shows that youth who are involved in volunteer community service have lower rates of alcohol use than others.¹³ Working together on a community project builds family communication and expands horizons. Decide together where you will volunteer your services. For example, you can volunteer to:



- Prepare and serve meals at a local soup kitchen.
- Help organize a food drive to stock a food pantry.
- Rake leaves or mow lawns for elderly residents.
- Pick up trash or maintain trails in a local or state park.
- Visit patients in a nursing home or senior citizen center.
- Help out at an animal shelter.
- Help coach a youth sports team.

By actively engaging in helping others, children develop energy, interests, and a positive outlook that helps keep them from underage drinking.

Use the following role-playing situations as a springboard to encourage your child to practice saying “No.” You may want to play the role of the “friend,” with your child speaking as himself or herself. These situations are only suggestions. You may want to use or add examples that are relevant to your life and that of your child.

Friend: “Let’s go bike riding. We’re not going far, so we don’t need helmets.”

Your Child: _____

Friend: “Let’s hitchhike to the mall. Lots of kids do it. We’ll be back before anyone knows we’re gone.”

Your Child: _____

Friend: “I got this beer from the basement. Here, try it.”

Your Child: _____

Help your child envision what would be the worst thing that could happen if he or she says “No.” Encourage your child to discuss his or her worries and concerns. Is he or she afraid of being embarrassed? Of losing a friend?

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SAMHSA

CSAP Center for Substance Abuse Prevention